

# One Aboriginal baby in five dies

From MICHAEL RICHARDSON

CANBERRA. — Nearly one in every five Aboriginal babies born in Central Australia dies before the age of 12 months.

This is revealed in figures released yesterday by the Federal Minister for the Interior (Mr. Hunt).

He said the 1970 death rate was higher than that of the year before.

It was a matter of real concern and the Government was looking into the problem.

Mr. Hunt was answering a question

on notice from Mr. L. R. Johnson (Lab., NSW) who asked what the infant mortality rate was for Aboriginal children in Central Australia in the past 12 months.

Provisional data for 1970 showed there were 272 live Aboriginal births in the southern division of the Northern Territory, Mr. Hunt said.

In this period 50 children died before they reached 12 months.

Corresponding figures for 1969 were 287 live Aboriginal births and 27 deaths.

He said that though there were periodic swings in the infant mortality rate in the southern division, it was not clear why there had been an increase in 1970.

"However, the attitudes of the Aborigines themselves to normal concepts of hygiene, the implications of the life style which most Aborigines choose to follow and the absence of family planning leading to the inadequate spacing of children are significant contributing factors," he said.

"The health of Aborigines is of major concern to the Government, and special

health and hygiene services, including infant welfare clinics, are provided in Aboriginal communities.

"While communal feeding services provide free planned meals for infants, Aboriginal parents frequently have to be reminded of the desirability of regular and adequate feeding for their children."

Mr. Hunt said the Department of Health undertook surveys, provided special assistance as required and evacuated cases of particular concern for intensive care and treatment in base hospitals.